

## Gamification in Learning English as Second Language

Language competence is a vital requirement for individuals aspiring to create vast and deep connections both in their private and professional life. Language skills are sought after widely, but few people have the resources to study a second language effectively. Lack of time, money, instruction and motivation create impediments in acquisition of communicative competence in L2 (second language). There is a vacuum for engaging alternatives that facilitate learning outside the bounds of academic schedules, funds and syllabi.

Research has proven that in order to read English fluently and smoothly, a learner needs to memorize at least two thousand commonly used English words. Obviously, vocabulary learning is a critical component in English language acquisition, because time spent in learning English in the classroom is limited and the teachers have to teach all the skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking); hence they seek alternative ways to help learners learn English vocabularies outside the classroom.

Mobile learning (m-learning) is one of such alternative and a smartphone is an effective way of independent learning because a learner can use it anytime and anywhere at his/her convenience. Apart from phones, games are also being used as viable alternatives to facilitate learning of grammar and vocabulary in the classroom.

As a concept, gamification has been around for a few years (2010) but only recently has it been applied in academic circles. Gamification is a relatively newer phenomenon that seeks to integrate some elements from games into other settings. According to Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, and Nacke (2011), gamification is “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts.” Sheldon (2012) offered a similar definition, in which he stated that “gamification is the application of game mechanics to non-game activities”. Gamification of learning is often confused with Game based learning. *Gamification is turning the learning process as a whole into a game, while Games-Based Learning (GBL) is using a game as part of the learning process.*

Gamification deals with fostering intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which is necessary in the language learning experience. Moreover, research has found that Educational Gamification in language learning is

basically new but its success in other disciplines made it adaptable to the development of second language acquisition (SLA).

Basically, any task, assignment, process or theoretical context can be gamified. The main objectives focuses on increasing the participation of a person, who most of the time is called a “user”, and motivate him/her by incorporating game elements and techniques, like leaderboards and immediate feedback. In theory, one can gamify any activity, not just learning ones. For instance, everything from fitness apps to LinkedIn’s profile pages can, and has been gamified to increase user participation and engagement.

Gamification turns the entire learning process into games taking game-mechanics and gameplay elements and applies them to existing learning courses and content with the aim of improving motivation and learner engagement. Examples of these mechanics include:

- Achievement badges: Visual representation of achievements for the use shown online.
- Points: Numeric accumulation based on certain activities
- Leaderboards: How the players are ranked based on success.
- Progress bars: Shows the status of a player.
- Levels/quests: Some of the tasks players have to fulfill in a game
- Avatars: Visual representation of a player or alter ego.
- Social elements: Relationships with other user through the game.
- Rewards/reward system: System to motivate players that accomplish a quest

Gamification techniques leverage peoples’ natural desire for competition, achievement, status, altruism, community collaboration and so on. Rewards such as badges and points are used to showcase the talents, expertise and accomplishments of users. Competition is another key aspect in Gamification. The desire to appear on the leaderboard drives players to complete more tasks, and in turn, fulfill deeper engagement. Gamification taps into the basic desires and needs of users’ impulses related to status and achievement. If learners are not motivated, they may not be able to solve a problem, despite having the skills. Conversely, with motivation, even with limited ability, they find a way to solve a challenge and also

improve on the skills. According to Fogg, motivation and ability alone are not enough. A “trigger” which is like a call for action, is also required so as to tell the user to achieve a certain behavior. Software applications serve as such triggers to change peoples’ attitudes and behavior.

## **Gamification Model**

Each game element used in Gamification enhances automatically the teaching and language learning process. Most of the games the public knows have these elements, but all of them follow a systematic plan. Every game integrates three basic elements: meta-centered activities, rewards, and progression (Dickey, 2005). Smith- Robbins (2011) mention that all game activities are meta-centered with activities oriented towards a specific objective, focused on winning by defeating obstacles and other conditions, in order to achieve or complete a quest. In addition, depending on the context, each game employs a mechanism for the player to receive rewards or reward system.

*Gamification, apart from providing independence, autonomy, competition and motivation for learners, has several other advantages:*

- **Increases Learner Engagement:** Learners are more likely to spend time playing a learning-based game if a reward system is used. Badges and points help translate the work the learner is completing into a tangible benefit. By increasing engagement, learning retention rises as learners are able to relate to the content better through practice than just reading or watching a lecture.
- **Creates Enthusiasm:** Gamification can foster feelings of enthusiasm towards the subject-matter. By creating a gamified system with rewards, learners are more excited and competitive while learning.
- **Provides Instant Feedback:** Most gamification systems allow instantaneous feedback, like leaderboards and dashboards that learners can use to see where they stand among their peers. This can push them to try quizzes or activities again to get a higher placement that creates motivation for further lesson engagement.
- **Makes Social Connections:** In higher education, it is found that learners have trouble creating social connections with other learners. Gamified classrooms, seated and virtual, help learners who have trouble with social interaction and give them a reason to work together. This is

especially true if the teacher creates team competitions that require learners to collaborate on challenges.

- Gamification places learners within systems where they can safely manipulate and explore functions (Squire, 2006) and assists with the transfer of learning to real world contexts and problems (Kapp, 2012).
- It promotes cooperation, teamwork, communities of learners and practice (Bellotti et al. 2010)

*Despite a host of advantages, gamification has its own pitfalls too; some of them being:*

- **Decreases Learner Attention Span:** Critics of gamified learning believe that the fast pace and immediate feedback creates a problem with learner attention span. Learners may begin to expect the same kind of responses from all parts of their education and won't find it, leading to frustration.
- **Cost:** The costs of gamified learning can be high because it involves equipment, support, software, and online registration costs. Often, these costs are passed on the learners as registration fees and course codes, creating a higher barrier for entry into the classroom.
- **Learner Assessment:** When choosing a game it is not often clear how the results of the game will tie into course assessments. While most games have a built-in way to track progress, the teacher needs to find a way to translate the learner's game progress into fulfilling objectives.
- It distracts learners from learning objectives (Bellotti et al., 2010) and learners manage time poorly.

A typical example of gamification in language is "Belly," (a part of Mindsnacks) voted the best gamification app in 2011, which is a picture recognition game where you help feed a hungry frog by pairing a word or phrase with its corresponding picture. The little frog then unleashes his sticky tongue to snatch the picture from the screen and into his belly.

Here are a few more examples for gamification in the real world:

- **Quest to Learn:** An entire, gamified school, Q2L uses game design elements like levels, missions, and quests to keep students engaged with learning material. "Boss levels" replace finals as a way to test students' ability to apply acquired knowledge.

- **Duolingo** : Duolingo is a gamified language-learning website and app with over a million downloads. By turning tests and lessons into challenges and keeping track of progress, Duolingo keeps learners engaged and motivated, even when they might otherwise be frustrated or bored.
- **FluentU**: Allows the learner to watch diverse video clips including real-world interviews, movie trailers, YouTube clips and much more, after which the game elements kick in. The learner is quizzed on the new words learned with fun exercises and visual learning tools. Performance indicators help track accuracy and the percentage of the video that you mastered or learned.

Gamification has come a long way since its inception and is an increasingly default feature for multiple types of software, from learning management systems and performance tracking programs.

One of the major changes in modern gamification is how subtle it has become. One could have an LMS app that tracks completion and offers badge rewards or just add some little reward badges to a regular Moodle. The offerings are sleeker, more piecemeal, and more easily integrated than ever.

Progress trackers, time trackers, achievements, and leaderboards are all simple gamification elements that tell us about how our learners are performing, at a glance.

It is reasonably established that utilizing gamification techniques in e-learning has a positive influence on the users' learning motivation. With proper integration of gamification in the field of e-learning into language education, a positive impact on the learning process can be achieved, such as higher satisfaction, motivation and greater engagement of students.

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